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SUBJECT: ZAMBIA GUN-SHY ON ZIMBABWE

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Booth for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) A UK Foreign Office/Ministry of Defense team, visiting Zambia to update its contingency plans for the evacuation of UK nationals from Zimbabwe, cut short its visit after the Zambian Government (GRZ) rejected its meeting requests. According to the UK Deputy High Commissioner, President Banda informed the mission that, in the event of an emergency, the UK could count on the GRZ's full support. Nevertheless, in the lead up to his State visit to Harare, Banda considered it unwise for the UK representatives to meet with their Zambian counterparts, lest news of the meetings leak to Zimbabwean authorities. The Deputy High Commissioner also told emboffs that she thought it unlikely that Banda would support Zimbabwe contingency planning meetings at any point in his presidency. The UK Defense Attache added that UK-Zambian defense relations had cooled significantly under the Banda Administration.

¶2. (C) Comment: Although defense cooperation in Zambia typically has been challenging, the GRZ's flat-out rebuff of the UK visit marks a new level of unresponsiveness and intransigency. The GRZ's unwillingness to accommodate the UK at any level sheds light on the value Banda places on good relations with his Zimbabwean counterpart and his fear of falling prey to accusations of collaboration with the British (a criticism that Mugabe had levied at Banda's predecessor). During an April 27 meeting, DCM sought out Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary Tens Kapoma's general views on the way forward in Zimbabwe. Although Kapoma acknowledged the opportunity presented by Banda's State visit to Zimbabwe in order to convince Mugabe to satisfy international donor expectations on human rights, Kapoma offered little insight on Zambia's assistance or intervention strategies. While Banda seems to disagree with land seizures and politically motivated violence and detention and may tell Mugabe the donors are concerned about such things, we do not believe Banda will press Mugabe very hard, if at all, for better behavior. This dearth of leadership and vision, and Banda's apparent timidity, reinforces Embassy's previous reporting that Banda is unlikely to confront problems in Zimbabwe at the expense of his relationship with Mugabe.

BOOTH